New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

Volume V, Number 10. • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of May 8, 1944

1944 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1943 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGES
Another Love Story	260, 261, 262
*Carmen Jones	207, 208, 209
Connecticut Yankee (A)	219, 220, 221, 222
Doctors Disagree	186, 187, 188
*Early to Bed	314, 315, 316
Harriet	364, 365, 366
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358
Listen, Professor	190, 191, 192
Lovers and Friends	210, 211, 212
Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303
*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
*One Touch of Venus	264, 265, 266
*Othello	256, 257, 258
Outrageous Fortune	237, 238, 239
Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
South Pacific	184, 185, 186
*Three's a Family	328, 329, 330
*Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
Victory Belles	244, 245, 246
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199, 200, 201, 202
What's Up	229, 230, 231
*Winged Victory	216, 217, 218, 219
*Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

1942 Vol.

*Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126
Janie	244, 245, 246
Rosalinda	187, 188, 189

1941 Vol.

*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
*Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457, 458, 459

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of May 8, 1944.

1944 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1944

Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
Allah Be Praised	207
Bright Boy	249
But Not Goodbye	220
Cherry Orchard (The)	276
*Chicken Every Sunday	232
*Decision	265
Duke in Darkness (The)	279
*Follow the Girls	222
*Helen Goes to Troy	201
*Highland Fling (A)	198
House in Paris (The)	241
Jackpot	284
*Jacobowsky and the Colonel	243
*Mexican Hayride	271
Mrs. January and Mr. Ex	235
Mrs. Kimball Presents	254
*Only the Heart	230
*Over Twenty-One	297
Peepshow	263
*Pick-Up Girl	196
Pretty Little Parlor	212
Public Relations	228
*Ramshackle Inn	295
Right Next to Broadway	256
*Searching Wind (The)	217
Sheppey	209
Storm Operation	289
Suds in Your Eye	287
Take It As It Comes	261
Thank You, Svoboda	251
*Wallflower	274

Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of May 8, 1944.

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Pick-Up Girl"
"A Highland Fling"
"Helen Goes to Troy"

Complete reviews appear in this issue with a summary on the back page

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"Pick-Up Girl"

Play by Elsa Shelley; directed by Roy Hargrave; setting by Watson Barratt; production supervised by James Colligan, Harry Bloomfield and Harriet Kaplan. Presented by Michael Todd's staff at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre, May 3, 1944.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
May 4, 1944

'Pick-Up Girl' Considers Juvenile Delinquency, But Has No Solution

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"PICK-UP GIRL" is a courtroom drama about a 15-year-old lass who is learning fast how to be a tramp, who already has acquired syphilis, and who is sent away by a kindly magistrate in the name of a kindly human society.

It is admirably acted, cleverly directed and often movingly written. It is the first play about a wartime problem, juvenile delinquency, to reach this season's theatre, and as such it deserves a respectful salute. But it does not rate the cheers some such play might get some time, for it merely states a problem and does not think beyond it.

Much theatrical skill has gone into "Pick-Up Girl" and by the time it has finished with you you are up to your neck in teen-age sin. If you had not known it before, you now know that girls get in trouble and men get them there. You know this is wrong, and that society is to blame. As Fredric March quotes Mark Twain in the new film, "The Adventures of Mark Twain," the only thing wrong with the human race is the human race.

An Old Problem Comes Up

But, I suspect, you have known all along that juvenile delinquency is bad. It isn't a brand new war problem, but an old one which has had some recent publicity. When I was 12 years old Judge Ben B. Lindsey took me on his knee and told me I'd better stop smoking, and letting my 7-year-old brother smoke. Lindsey, the kids' judge of Denver, was a pioneer in dramatizing the innocent crimes of childhood—and he thought beyond them. He spent a lifetime trying to make the human race a better custodian of its offspring.

I'm afraid Judge Lindsey didn't get very far, noted as he was as a crusader, in correcting a social evil; and neither does Elsa Shelley, who wrote "Pick-Up Girl." She is a reporter, not a campaigner—so, instead of having written an important drama that some day will be written, she must be content with having achieved some excellent descriptive theatre.

A Courtroom Parade

Miss Shelley's play is, to begin with, a difficult stunt—the presentation of a continuous action in a courtroom, with most of the drama coming from questions by the judge and answers by the witnesses. It holds interest—and makes the parade of characters human one by one.

The girl before the court—well played by Pamela Rivers—is underprivileged. Her father, after years of unemployment, has been doing war factory work in California. Her mother, a hard-working domestic, has saddled her with the care of three younger children. The girl, urged by a hardened female schoolmate who knows how easy it is to have a good time and get pretty presents, becomes a pick-up girl. Her first affair is with a sailor encountered at 43d and Broadway.

When the law catches up with her there is a juvenile court hearing, with William Harrigan presiding as a gentle, understanding judge. Before him come parents, neighbors, tough kids, silly little bimbos, bailiffs, lady cops and a boy who is in love with the poor young sinner.

Most of these vignettes are sketched with economy and vigor, and some with humor, and Director Roy Hargrave has kept a fundamentally static drama alive with considerable sagacity. Among the players who perform excellently are Marvin Forde, as the boy who loves the girl; Zachary A. Charles as a young mugg, Kathryn Grill as the mother and Frank Tweddell as the mousy father. Watson Barratt's courtroom set is completely realistic.

THE CAST

Judge Bentley	William Harrigan
Miss Porter	Doro Merande
Mrs. Busch	Edmonia Nolley
Court Clerk	Douglas Keaton
Door Attendant	William Foran
Mrs. Collins	Kathryn Grill
Larry Webster	Zachary A. Charles
Mrs. Martl	Lili Valenty
Alexander Elliott	Arthur Mayberry
Mr. Brill	Bigelow Sayre
Policeman Owens	Morty Martell
Elizabeth Collins	Pamela Rivers
Jackie Polumbo	Joe Johnson
Miss Russell	Dorothy Blackburn
Mr. Collins	Frank Tweddell
Ruby Lockwood	Toni Favor
Peter Martl	Marvin Forde
Mary	Lois Wheeler
Jean	Rosemary Rice

NEW YORK TIMES
May 4, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Pick-Up Girl"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"PICK-UP GIRL," which opened last evening at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre, is another of those plays in which the practice falls considerably short of the intention. On the face of it, Elsa Shelley's drama should be an important addition to the serious side of the waning season, for it deals with a current problem, juvenile delinquency. To give it a fair hearing, the group of people known as "Michael Todd's Staff" have found some good actors headed by William Harrigan. But despite everything being potentially in excellent order, the play in that final form the audience sees is talky, often dull and, on the occasions when it changes pace, it lunges over into a shrill hysteria.

• • •

Miss Shelley's story and her characters are perhaps a little too pat; they follow in the theatrical tradition. All the sins that conceivably may be visited on the children are there, for the author does not go in for surprises. The figures of "Pick-Up Girl" are either completely good or bad, and the good ones are sentimentally good and the bad ones are the worst of the race. Where there should be more action the play contents itself with talking about it. The scene is a courtroom, and too often when the play seems to be about to start moving more briskly the judge stops a witness and says to come into his chambers. The audience is left with the impression the better play of the two may be going on in there.

As noted, the subject matter of "Pick-Up Girl" deserves a good play. The leading character is a girl of 15 whose father has moved to California to work in a shipyard, whose mother also is working—leaving the child to care for brothers and sisters. A girl down the block takes her out and two sailors pick them up; an illegal operation results. Later, another woman in the apartment house complains to the police and the girl is found in her room with a middle-aged man. In the courtroom it develops that she has a venereal disease, so she is sent to the hospital before starting a term in the reform school.

• • •

Mr. Harrigan is the judge and plays it in a soft-spoken, gentle manner which is effective, even though legal realists might complain this judge permits things in his court which duly constituted courts might frown upon. Pamela Rivers is the girl, and she gives an excellent performance in a stiff role for a Broadway debut. Another good player is Marvin Forde, the boy who is sincerely in love with her. Doro Merande has another of her dry roles, and Kathryn Grill and Frank Tweddell play the parents. In directing, Roy Hargrave has not succeeded in getting rid of the impression Judge Bentley's court room too often is a rather tedious place. Watson Barrett has designed the setting. But despite many of the players and the idea, "Pick-Up Girl" is a disappointment.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
May 4, 1944

Adolescent Tragedy

By HOWARD BARNES

JUVENILE delinquency is examined with clinical detail in "Pick-Up Girl." As a piece of dramatic reporting this Elsa Shelley play is grimly exhaustive. It is also a bit exhausting in its preoccupation with every sordid aspect of the case history of a wayward and diseased young girl. The writing is honest, the acting is uniformly excellent, and there are moments of dramatic depth and meaning in the new Forty-eighth Street offering. It still does not emerge as much more than a shrewd stage photograph of a problem which must be familiar to any one who knows what is going on in the world today.

• • •

To the great credit of Miss Shelley she has never for an instant resorted to sensationalism in her account of an adolescent tragedy. Instead, she has probed into the real causes which made her fifteen-year-old a prostitute and a menace to society. By a clever juxtaposition of characters, in the single setting of a juvenile court, she has put the finger on the girl's family and her school friends, as well as the elderly hyena, with whom she was picked up by the police. There are a succession of absorbing encounters in the action. The hitch is that they are never brought into an integrated theatrical unity. You may be shocked and even moved as the figures of the work disclose an enormous crime of contemporary society, but there is no resolution of the tragedy.

• • •

The performers never let the play down. Pamela Rivers achieves an extraordinarily right and subtle portrayal of an impoverished and overworked kid who merely wanted to have fun. Without ever relying on melodramatic over-emphasis, she creates a fully dimensioned characterization of a wayward youngster, which could be multiplied many fold at the moment. Marvin Forde, as the boy next door who champions her even after he learns that she has syphilis, is equally fine at reflecting the human desolation of the theme. Their scenes together take on a strange beauty as well as an engrossing intensity. They are two young actors to be watched.

• • •

Holding the episodic interludes together is William Harrigan, in the role of an understanding judge, who cares more about discovering the causes of delinquency than the lurid details of its occurence. He handles a difficult role with proficient understatement.

Then there are Zachary A. Charles and Toni Fayor, giving splendid bits as tough kids who have not yet been caught and Frank Tweddel and Kathryn Grill, characterizing the neglectful parents clearly and bitterly. Roy Hargrave has directed them all as resourcefully as the script permits. "Pick-Up Girl" is analytically fascinating, but it is not very illuminating in terms of a social problem or those of the theater.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
May 4, 1944

See Pick-Up Girl; It's a New Todd Hit

By BURTON RASCOE

I BEG OF YOU: plan to see Pick-Up Girl, even if you have to start saving pennies in order to do so. It opened at the 48th Street Theater last night; but I think will still be running when you have hoarded enough for your tickets and for a long time afterwards. It is not merely a human tragedy with a terrific emotional impact; it is an education in charity and humanity and it carries a bright gleam of hope in the pressing problem of juvenile delinquency. It is a resounding hit.

The entire action takes place during an afternoon in a Juvenile Court, and only twice during the two hours and a half was I shaken into a realization that it is only a play and not an actual court scene. Those jolts were from two "comedy" lines Doro Merande (probably against her better judgment) was required to utter. One of them is not only false (that is, it does not proceed from the character projected by Miss Merande) but in distinctly bad taste and dangerous to the mood of high seriousness of the drama.

Aside from these two minor errors of judgment, introduced no doubt with a laudable attempt to provide comedy relief from the terrific tension, I'd say this play is perfect in every way—in concept, in characterization, in thematic progression, in observation of court procedure, in realism, in the acting, the staging, the costuming and the setting in mood, emotional depth, taste and intelligence.

Todd Cuts in Staff

This is the sort of drama that you know from the first act that the next two acts will be at least equally good; that there will be no let-down. So I had no hesitancy about saying to Michael Todd between acts: "You have certainly done nobly by your boys and girls; this play can't miss." By "your boys and girls," I mean Mr. Todd's office employees. After he had risked his own money and felt from the out-of-town reception of the play that he had a hit on his hands, he dealt his staff in on shares in the profits of the play and turned it over to them. It is therefore billed as presented not by Mr. Todd but by his staff.

When Mr. Todd saw how I felt about Pick-Up Girl, he told me of a project he has: "I am going to organize a good road company and play it in court rooms all over the country for the benefit of judges, court officers, police and other city officials." That, I said, would be a most worthy benefaction and should do a lot of good. "But is also good showmanship," said the candid and always surprising Mr. Todd. "Besides it won't cost anything except for actors' salaries and traveling expenses. The set is there in every court house."

I don't think that judges are in need of the lessons which are implicit in Pick-Up Girl. All of them that I knew, both male and female, in the juvenile and domestic relations courts, back in my days of news reporting, were very like the judge portrayed so marvellously by William Harrigan in Pick-Up Girl. But I should say that every mother and father and adolescent who possibly can should see this play; and so should all who have any direct professional concern with the education and rehabilitation of youthful delinquents.

The Problem Itself

Elsa Shelley, the author of Pick-Up Girl, offers no solution to the problem of juvenile delinquency. Her dramatic and moral intentions are far too honest for that. There is no cheap theatrical fakery or gimcrack moralizing in her drama. What she offers is the problem itself, with all the concentrated realism you might get by watching a particularly tragic case unfold before you if you were privileged to sit in with a humane and intelligent juvenile court justice during a private hearing of such a case. That, and a poignant appeal to your sense of decency.

The story is that of a 15-year-old girl who is induced by an older, wayward girl to pick up a sailor for an evening of "fun." The consequences within four months are an abortion, an arrest on a morals charge and a positive Wasserman, before the victim's parents (the mother a cook and the father a shipyards worker who has gone all the way to California for his first employment since 1929) learn anything about it. With all this tragic mess there is a tender and veristic love-story.

The cast is so wonderful it is almost invidious to accord any special honors; but besides Mr. Harrigan, I am especially grateful to Kathryn Grill, Marvin Forde, Pamela Rivers, Lili Valenty and Frank Tweddell for the great satisfaction their art gave me. And I bow to Watson Barratt for the setting, to Emeline Roche for the costumes and to Roy Hargrave for the staging. Mr. Todd's staff is a lucky one.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
May 4, 1944

A Good Theme But That's All

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

PICK-UP GIRL is a courtroom tale of juvenile delinquency. The theme is timely, much of the story is plausible, and the approach is sincere. Miss Shelley has not drenched her story in melodrama, or turned up its seamy side for the gratification of sensation-seekers. On the contrary, she has gone too far in the other direction, using her judge as a humane but overdidactic mouthpiece for airing her problem. This didacticism overloads the play, and a commonplace touch and slack dramatic sense slowly undermine it. The value of a genuine case history is that it is true. A fictional one, when it does not possess dramatic and psychological merits of its own, falls between two stools. It is aping facts rather than achieving truth. It is borrowing formlessness rather than creating form. And in the case of *Pick-Up Girl*, what Miss Shelley does invent on the side seems all too concocted.

* * *

The entire action of the play takes place in a juvenile court. Fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Collins was arrested when caught in bed with a man in his forties. Hers is a familiar story: parents out working, straitened circumstances, lots of dull household chores, and a knowing girl friend who shows Elizabeth the way to the fun that she craves. In no time Elizabeth became promiscuous and, as it turns out, diseased. There was nothing the judge could do but send her away to be cured and reclaimed.

Miss Shelley faces her central problem squarely, ultimately blaming neither the underprivileged girl nor the overburdened parents, but the social setup. Up to this point *Pick-Up Girl* is as unimpeachable as it is uninspired. But into her story Miss Shelley has brought an upstanding youth who is in love with Elizabeth, and who, with adolescent ardor, plans for her to escape from court and run away with him. This boy and girl stuff is treated sentimentally and unconvincingly, it protracts a play that is already too slow and too long, and it vitiates the seriousness of the main theme. Aside from a few effective scenes and some creditable acting, *Pick-Up Girl* is largely a matter of good intentions.

* *

The youngsters come through very well. Pamela Rivers plays Elizabeth with genuine feeling for the character. Marvin Forde, as the decent boy, is far more persuasive than the role itself, and Zachary A. Charles is effective as a tough kid. William Harrigan plays the Judge very much as a benevolent one would be; but the role remains a little stuffy. Watson Barratt has done a nice courtroom set.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
May 4, 1944

'Pick-Up Girl' Bows At 48th St. Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

A TRIAL PLAY, especially a trial play that never leaves the courtroom, is apt to be either very, very good, or very, very bad.

"Pick-Up Girl," which the fabulous Michael Todd's fortunate staff brought last night into the 48th Street Theatre, is very, very good. As a matter of next day truth-telling, it's the most effective trial play I've ever seen, with the possible exception of "The Trial of Mary Dugan."

Mind you, I'm not insisting that "Pick-Up Girl" is bound to be immediately triumphant. It's too outspoken, too deep-seeing, too relentless for an overnight sensation. Elsa Shelley, one more lady player turned lady playwright, has written of juvenile delinquency with cold, keen anger, letting her blows fall where they should. In each of her three fightful acts, she practically beats up an adult.

Miss Shelley, wife of playwright Irving Kaye Davis, has reported on our 'teen age youngsters with candor, compassion and understanding. Having studied them, she turns to us, their elders, to point the finger of blame. It is us grown-ups who have made them what they are today. And she hopes—she hopes to God!—we're deeply disturbed and dissatisfied. According to her, we should be.

Honest Playwriting

As you'd know, there's an up-and-going clock on the wall of Watson Barratt's Juvenile Court at the 48th Street Theatre. The action of Elsa Shelley's documentary melodrama of juvenile delinquency moves as fatefully, as unfalteringly as that timepiece's unhuman hands. In the late afternoon of a day in June, Elizabeth Collins, a misguided Magdalene of 15 years of age, is tried and found wanting.

Merely a minor Manhattan incident. Inside newspaper stuff; page 15 or 16, if at all. Who on earth is Elizabeth Collins, high school girl of far W. 53th st. Who on earth are her parents; the father a shipyard worker, the mother a cook? Who on earth are middle-aged Alexander Elliott, who seduces her, and young Larry Webster, who tries to? Who on earth is Peter Marti, who loves and cherishes her?

Yet, in Miss Shelley's honest playwriting hands, abetted by a cast that couldn't be bettered, and aided by direction that couldn't be improved upon, these nonentities, these nobodies, these so-called "little people" add up to something tremendous, important, significant and frightening in the make-up of these United States today. Is Elizabeth Collins a composite likeness of Miss America? If so, Heaven help us!

Young Folks Score

Michael Todd, his staff and his director, Hargrave, have cast "Pick-Up Girl" with a skill all but miraculous. Because this is true,

each character stands out with a three-dimensional impressiveness of its own. Even the attendants in the courtroom—Doro Merande as Miss Porter, Edmonia Nolley as Mrs. Busch, Douglas Keaton as clerk—add greatly to the effectiveness of Elsa Shelley's fine first play.

From start to finish, William Harrigan is a judge a Juvenile Court should pray for. There're moments when he seems more patient than could be humanly possible; when a less God-like man would have burst out into high and mighty anger at man's—and woman's, mostly—persistent and sinful stupidity. Judge Bentley never really does so.

Three young people—Pamela Rivers, as the wayward Elizabeth; Zachary Charles, as the Larry Webster who craves her, and Marvin Forde, as the Peter Marti who loves her—are players of perfection. Kathryn Grill is notable as the mother of Elizabeth; Arthur Mayberry is valiantly villainous as the middle-aged wolf in man's clothing. It's a pity the Pulitzer Prize givers and "Pick-Up Girl" didn't manage to get together. Each might well have benefitted by a meeting.

NEW YORK SUN
May 4, 1944

'Pick-Up Girl,' Court Room Drama of Juvenile Delinquency, Has Premiere

By HERRICK BROWN

THE problem of juvenile delinquency in wartime moved out from behind the closed doors of the children's courts into the full glare of the Broadway stage last evening as Elsa Shelley's new play, "Pick-Up Girl," had its premiere at the 48th Street.

As a result it is doubtful if any of those present will again read a newspaper account of a youngster in trouble casually, for while Miss Shelley's play may not be the most perfect court room drama that a Broadway audience has witnessed, it is an honest and frequently moving portrait of a current situation that well merits consideration by the stage. Let no devotee of Michael Todd's glamorous musical productions erroneously be lured into the Forty-eighth street, however, by the play's title and Mr. Todd's link to the production through James Colligan, Harry Bloomfield, and Harriet Kaplan of his staff, for there is nothing light-hearted about "Pick-Up Girl."

The story that Miss Shelley has to tell is the sordid and pathetic and all too common one of a girl, 15, looking for a good time and drawn by the glib talk of bad companions along a path that lands her eventually in the hands of the police. Elizabeth Collins, Miss Shelly's heroine, had been caught in her room with a middle-aged Manhattan playboy, and the playwright lets you learn all that had led up to her arrest as a humane and understanding children's court judge digs the facts out of a series of witnesses. It proves a highly effective method for at least part of the evening, and the impact of her opening act is powerful. To set an entire play in a court room is always a risky business, however. Court procedure always slows up action and revealing the major part of a plot from the witness stand tends to pall when stretched over three acts. As a result Miss Shelley's last two acts are never quite as gripping as her opening one. We, at least, could not have departed, however, before the door had closed for the last time on young Elizabeth. Miss Shelley pulls no punches along the way and her heroine encounters all the penalties of waywardness, including an illegal operation and disease.

All the characters in her play are straight out of life, and they are well played by an excellent cast. The task of knitting the whole drama together falls on the shoulders of William Harrigan as the judge, and his jurist is human and real and would be a credit to any juvenile bench in the land. Two of the players, Pamela Rivers and Marvin Forde, are making their Broadway debut in "Pick-Up Girl" and they are youngsters Broadway should try to keep. Miss Rivers catches perfectly all the bravado, and the childish fright too, that Miss Shelley has written into the part of Elizabeth, and Mr. Forde is boyishly sincere and right as the young musician who loves her. Zachary A. Charles gives an effective performance as the tough kid whom Elizabeth has brushed off, and small Joe Johnson makes the most of his brief bit as a truant urchin.

Mr. Todd has every right to be proud of his staff today. They have given a fine production to a candid and sincere play.

NEW YORK POST
May 4, 1944

'Pick-Up Girl' Opens at 48th St.—Case History in Juvenile Delinquency

By WILELLA WALDORF

ALTHOUGH the program at the 48th St. Theatre calls "Pick-Up Girl" a new play by Elsa Shelley, it is actually a case history in juvenile delinquency. Miss Shelley could, and probably did, write her "play" from a court record. Since it takes place entirely in a court-room, the author makes no effort to do anything more than call attention to the fact that hundreds of such cases exist. She lets the record speak for itself. The case of Elizabeth Collins, age 15, is a tragic and horrifying record.

Precisely why Miss Shelley wrote "Pick-Up Girl" in the first place, and precisely why three members of Michael Todd's staff produced it last night at the 48th St. Theatre, is a question. It is, of course, possible that they saw in this plain-spoken, brutally frank court record of the desperate plight of a young girl who drifted into bad company a chance to attract sensation-seekers to the box-office.

There is, however, only one decent reason for writing and producing such a record as "Pick-Up Girl", and we prefer to believe that its sponsors were moved by a genuine feeling that such a story told on a Broadway stage, as realistically as possible, might call attention to a festering sociological condition in need of far more drastic remedies than any of the well-meaning steps so far taken to combat it.

Hundreds of Elizabeths

Juvenile delinquency, of course, is not confined to war time, but it often gets more attention then because it ceases to be merely an eternally baffling problem for judges, probation officers, police and social workers, and becomes in addition a menace to the armed forces. Now is as good a time as any to remind the public that such girls as Elizabeth Collins exist by the hundreds and that pathetically little is being done about them.

It is easy to shrug it all off with a remark to the effect that the parents are to blame, but that's only part of the trouble. A more rebellious playwright than Miss Shelley might have torn into the uneven structure of our social system and pointed out that Elizabeth Collins is the fruit of a fundamental maladjustment of the world's goods.

Miss Shelley, however, merely lets the judge, a kindly fellow striving to do what he can against impossible odds, draw a few tolerant, well-balanced conclusions and clear the court for the next Elizabeth.

If "Pick-Up Girl" manages to make even a few people sit up and take notice of this problem, no doubt it will have served a purpose. We must confess that it left us last night with the same feeling of futility experienced some years ago while working in a Boston settlement house. Scientific efforts were being made by a large staff of social workers to alleviate suffering and aid the needy in a district where hundreds of families seemed to be living entirely on charity. But next to nothing was being done to try to answer the all-important question: "What causes that?"

Fortunately, there are a number of measures that can be taken right now to combat, at least in some degree, the rise in juvenile delinquency here and in other cities. Dorothy Norman has pointed out some of them in her column in this paper. If "Pick-Up Girl" helps to bring about even a few reforms it will have been worth while.

In the meantime, we can hardly recommend Miss Shelley's case history as entertainment in the usual Broadway sense. It is shocking, sometimes harrowing, and it minces no words. Luckily it is excellently produced under Roy Hargrave's direction and very well acted by a company headed by William Harrigan as the judge and Pamela Rivers as the young delinquent. Realism is the aim, and almost everybody manages to seem depressingly real, as does Watson Barratt's courtroom set.

"A Highland Fling"

Comedy by Margaret Curtis; directed by George Abbott; settings by John Root. Presented by Mr. Abbott at the Plymouth Theatre, April 28, 1944.

THE CAST

Charlie MacKenzie	Ralph Forbes
Jeannie MacKenzie	Frances Reid
Sir Archibald MacKenzie	John Ireland
The Lady of Shalott	Margaret Curtis
Rabbie MacGregor	Karl Swenson
Lizzie MacGregor	Marguerite Clifton
Bessie MacGregor	Patti Brady
Malcolm Graham	Ivan Miller
Lila Graham	Marjorie Davies
Hamish Hamilton	John Robb
Alicetrina MacLean	Gloria Hallward
Jamie MacTavish	John McQuade
Sandy MacGill	Nicholas Saunders
The Rev. Douglas Stuart	St. Clair Bayfield
Mrs. MacGill	Marguerite Morrissey
Mora MacTavish	Pax Walker
Ian	James McFadden
Mrs. Ferguson	Margaret Thomas
Mr. MacDonald	James Lane

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 30, 1944

The Scotch Is Watered a Bit

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

UNLIKE most of the season's encounters with ghosts, *A Highland Fling* comes close enough to likeable fantasy to make

one wish it had come all the way. Miss Curtis has succeeded pretty well in establishing the proper atmosphere, and has been fairly inventive in keeping her story going. At least *A Highland Fling* is not just mechanical and commonplace. But, though it sometimes gets off the ground, it never manages to stay in the air. The writing simply hasn't enough verve or wit—or, in its more poetic moments, enough radiance. The story hasn't enough movement; it keeps falling back upon certain situations without giving them extra spin—so that too much of the play seems talky and tame. Much of this might have been concealed through very adroit and airy direction. But Mr. Abbott, possibly recoiling from his slambang farce methods, has staged the play in what seems to me a faintly solemn manner. It moves too slowly; everybody even seems to talk too slowly—perhaps because everybody talks in very broad Scotch.

* * *

The play has to do with Charlie MacKenzie, a rakish 18th century laird who, kept out of heaven, has for 150 years spectrally revisited his old haunts. The sentimental side of the story tells of his romance with a village girl who, knowing that normal grownups cannot communicate with ghosts, has (as it were) turned herself daft. The prankish side of the play deals with Charlie's belated efforts to get into heaven—the terms being that he must reform a living sinner. He selects the neighborhood tosspot and wencher, and the most amusing parts of the play grow out of their efforts to hoodwink each other.

There are pleasant scenes in the play, mildly touching moments, agreeable roulades of talk. And Miss Curtis' ghost- and angel-haunted world (for Charlie has a very attractive angel wife) does not seem to alien. But that all-important thing in fantasy—the perfect touch—is just never there. Some of the writing is too cute and some of it too heavy. *A Highland Fling* might have been gay, or it might have been charming. But it is never quite either one.

The acting is very competent, but not completely right. Ralph Forbes makes a good ghost, but lacks a rascally charm. Margaret Curtis makes an appealing, but never quite appealing enough, girl. Karl Swenson lacks a happy sinner's gusto, and John Ireland a young laird's elegance. Only Frances Reid, looking lovely as the angel, has the right lightness and grace.

NEW YORK POST
April 29, 1944

'A Highland Fling,' Part Fantasy, Part Farce, Opens at the Plymouth

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE new comedy entitled "A Highland Fling" which George Abbott produced at the Plymouth Theatre last night, proved to be a surprisingly tame little romp involving a be-kilted ghostie who does some amiable haunting in and about the Scottish castle occupied by his great, great, great, great grandson.

Margaret Curtis, who wrote the play and also appears in it, has hit upon a rather engaging idea for her Scottish lark and for a few minutes at the beginning of the first act we had great hopes that "A Highland Fling" might turn out to be something extraordinarily gay and charming in the fantasy line.

It soon developed, however, that Miss Curtis' play was never going to match the eerie quality generated by the scenic and lighting efferts depicting the old castle by moonlight.

Miss Curtis, in fact, couldn't seem to make up her mind whether she was writing a Barriesque fantasy about an imaginative little Scottish lassie who pretended to be a daftie because she was in love with the cold, grey ghost, or whether she was turning out a typical George Abbott farce about the goings-on at the village pub.

After the first few moments, we found both fantasy and farce almost equally debilitating.

The Barrie Mood

Since Miss Curtis herself acts the role of Silly, the daftie who pretends she's the Lady of Shalott, she apparently fancies the Barrie mood. Except for the fact that her brogue sounds authentic (it ought to be, since she was born in Glasgow), we kept thinking that Miss Curtis, as the saying goes, was rather miscast as Silly.

This probably makes us out more of a daftie than Silly, since Miss Curtis wrote the part for herself and presumably knew what she wanted in it. Nevertheless she never seemed to get very far, possibly because her fantasy itself seldom managed to rise off the ground. There is remarkably little poetry in "A Highland Fling."

When it came to farce, both Miss Curtis and Mr. Abbott, who directed, seemed more at home. Everybody from the village minister down was caricatured to a considerable degree, and there was some mild spoofing of a Scottish-American from Pittsburgh who was more of a highlander than any of the highlanders.

Winning His Wings

The plot of this curious piece concerns the efforts of Ghostie to reform Rabbie MacGregor, most notorious of the local drunkards, gamblers and woman-chasers. If the reformation succeeds, Ghostie will win his wings and ascend to Heaven where his wife has been waiting for him these hundred and fifty years.

Rabbie, of course, has no intention of reforming, but pretends he has seen the light, in the hope of getting rid of Ghostie. There is also a great deal of pother about the famous Scone Stone, historic seat upon which the ancient Scottish kings were crowned.

Seems the Stone, according to the Encyclopaedia, now rests in Westminster Abbey, but it's actually being guarded right there in that Scottish castle, so the English can't get hold of it. Finally the Scots palm it off on the American to take back to Pittsburgh.

Frankly, we found all this not only dull but often downright trying. Much of the acting is on a par with the play, the pleasantest items of the evening being Ralph Forbes' genial portrayal of Ghostie, and John Root's sets.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 29, 1944

Quick and Dead Get Mixed Once More

By BURTON RASCOE

WE are certainly getting an education in the after-life from the theater (and the movies) these days. Just how authentic the information is, deponent saith not. But on the evidence presented by "—But Not Goodbye," Sheppey and, now, A Highland Fling (as well as the movie exhibits) we might as well live, since there doesn't seem to be any particular point in dying, because it seems we go on (at least for a time) being pretty much the same as we were when we became deceased.

A Highland Fling is Margaret Curtis' fling at the subject, and it is a mildly engaging one, frequently very funny and so complicated in its tangles of the quick and the dead that you are kept on edge as to how it is all going to come out. Its principal fault is not that the fantasy is beyond belief but that it acts out as though it were. I could believe thoroughly in the concept but not in incidents or the characters: they were all stage actors to me, engaged in some very funny didoes, to be sure, but never giving me a sense of reality.

Miss Curtis, the author, is an actress who, according to the program, "was bogged down by a series of flops and mediocre roles," after a flourishing start which began with Point Vantage and ended with Five Kings; so, "took matters into her own hands" and wrote A Highland Fling, not neglecting to write herself a juicy part in it. She appears as a daft girl in a village near the foot of Cairn McGorum in Scotland who believes she is the Lady of Shallot and is in love with the ghost of a former laird of the Castle of Cairn McGorum, who haunts the castle to guard the real Stone of Scone—the one taken by the English under Edward I and now reposing in the throne room of Westminster Abbey being a fake.

Bored Ghost

The ghost (Ralph Forbes) has a wife who has become an angel and who returns to twit him about his choice of gals, about his age as compared with that of the girl (he being old enough to be her great, great, great, great grandfather), and about the unsatisfactory nature of his kisses, which are cold. She cajoles him with promises that there are many beautiful unattached ladies in heaven, all of them perfect, even as to their kisses, for they are angels. . . . But the earth-bound ghost is still masculine enough to be wary of angels. Yet, at the same time, he is tired of his job of guarding the Stone of Scone, a very tedious business involving a lot of moaning to scare strangers away.

He can't reach heavenly bliss, however, without atoning for being a cutup in his days as a mortal, conked in a pub brawl over a bar wench. If he can reform a real sinner, he will be a free spirit. He selects Rabbie MacGregor to do a job on. Rabbie, though married and the father of a child who also knows the ghost personally and talks with him, is a real heller—a booze hound, a gambler, and a chaser of women—at present engaged in incontinently violating one of the commandments with a barmaid.

Reformed Sinner

The bane of Rabbie's life is the ghost, for the shadows of the castle walls are his favorite spot for seduction, because there (being something of a poet) he can go into his routine of rhapsodizing about the beauties of the cairns and then telling the girl that the mountains and their purple mists now mean nothing to him since she has come into his life. Just when he gets 'em going, however, the ghost gives out with a moan and scares the gizzard out of the girl, and so love's labor is lost. To still the barmaid's tears, brought on by fears that Rabbie is henceforth going to be faithful to his wife, Rabbie lets her in on the secret that his reform is for one day only because the ghost's ascension takes place at dusk and Rabbie can then go back to sinning again. Rabbie has a tough time rejecting temptation but the ghost helps by seeing to it that he can't get a drink or win at dice. At a village party at the pub in celebration of a Scots-American's taking the Stone of Scone to Pittsburgh for safe-keeping and also in celebration of Rabbie's reform, Rabbie inadvertently pinches the barmaid in an unholy manner and the ghost comes raging back.

It is all very Scottish, broadly whimsical and mechanical, rather than inspired, but often quite good fun. An able cast, under the able auspices of George Abbott, has a holiday with the unprofessional script.

NEW YORK SUN
April 29, 1944

'A Highland Fling,' Scottish Ghost Comedy, Has Premiere at the Plymouth

By HERRICK BROWN

TO turn playwright being very much in style for actresses this season since Ruth Gordon came through with a resounding hit in her "Over Twenty-One," Margaret Curtis has proceeded to join in the current fashion. Her entry, a Scottish ghost

story which she has called "A Highland Fling," arrived at the Plymouth Theater last evening. Like Miss Gordon, Miss Curtis has written in a nice fat part for herself, and she plays it most engagingly.

As has been true of many another first play, Miss Curtis's comedy has the bad habit of faltering now and then along the way. She has hit upon a good comedy idea for her plot, however, and on the whole she works it out well enough to provide a pleasantly amusing evening with a goodly measure of hearty laughs scattered through the play's three acts.

The ghost of "A Highland Fling" is a comically swashbuckling fellow. He'd been a lusty chap, with a keen eye for a pretty lass and a flair for drinking and gambling at the town pub in life and the fact that heaven has been barred to him for a century and a half, is no great source of worry to him. Children can see him and people who are daft, too, and one young girl of the highlands has even deliberately put herself in the latter class rather than lose him and his love. Besides, there is the Scone Stone to guard, for, of course, he, like any good Scottish ghost, knows that the real Scone Stone is still in Scotland, not in Westminster Abbey for the Kings of England to sit upon. All in all it's a pleasant life. Still the picture his wife, an angel, paints of a sky full of comely lassies up above has its attraction, too. He has only to reform some earthly sinner of philandering, gambling and too hearty a thirst, his wife informs him, to find the gates of heaven ajar. How he picks on Rabbie MacGregor, who has all the necessary failings, as his ticket through the pearly gates and what comes of it forms the basis for Miss Curtis's play.

Ralph Forbes is capital as the ghost and "A Highland Fling" really kicks up its heels in a gay manner when he is on the stage and it slumps off when he departs. Miss Curtis, of course, is Silly Shalott, who finally makes herself believe she is the Lady of Shalott, and she makes the love-sick girl both an appealing and a touching figure. The young actress who really runs away with the show when her part gives her the opportunity is Miss Patti Brady, aged 7, as Bessie, the daughter of the wayward Rabbie. Being a child, she can see the ghost all right but there is nothing spectral about her viewpoint, and the youngster succeeds admirably in keeping the ghost story safely linked to earth. Karl Swenson is sufficiently swaggering as Rabbie and some good bits are contributed by Gloria Hallward as the barmaid who is Rabbie's current light of love and Ivan Miller as an American steeped in Scottish lore and out to save the hallowed stone from British hands.

The pace of Miss Curtis's play is decidedly meandering for those used to George Abbott's fast-stepping comedy productions, but he, as usual, displays his skill as a director and he has given "A Highland Fling" an excellent production. John Root did the settings and his mountain glide is especially attractive.

"A Highland Fling" will hardly serve to displace Ruth Gordon as 45th street's No. 1 actress-playwright, but both Miss Curtis and her comedy are apt to find plenty of adherents of their own these spring evenings.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 29, 1944

"A Highland Fling" At the Plymouth

By ROBERT GARLAND

BEHOLD the plaque-winning farce the boys should have chosen! If the meticulous members of the Drama Critics Circle could have held their horses until this morning, they might have chosen "A Highland Fling" as their pet play of the season. Here are fact and fancy, surprise and suspense, love and laughter, life and death, moulded into a top-notch evening's entertainment. But with nothing unpleasantly controversial.

It may not be as theatrically expert as "The Voice of the Turtle." Or as superficially social-minded as "The Searching Wind." Or as wittily topical as "Over Twenty-One." Or as ardently all-American as "Oklahoma." Or as persistently oh-say-can-you-see-ish as "Winged Victory." But "A Highland Fling" is a fine example of what the showshop ordered, a fresh and funny piece of make-believe without an argument about it.

Even the most cautious critic can come right out and "yes" it. And more than likely will!

• • •

Margaret Curtis, might-have-been winner of the Drama Critics Circle Prize, is the third performing lady to write herself a vehicle this season. The first was Ruth Gordon, who, in "Over Twenty-One," wrote herself a wonder. The second was Claiborne Foster, who, in "Pretty Little Parlor," wrote herself a what-was-it? she didn't have the courage to play. For worse, rather than for better, she turned it over to Stella Adler.

The third is Margaret Curtis, who, in "A Highland Fling," comes somewhere in between with an adult and amusing composition in which she is a daftie, the lovely and slightly loonie Lady of Shalott. "Silly" is what her best friends call her; Silly Shalott. Among these best friends are the former Laird of Cairn McGorum, who happens to be a dead ghost, and Rabbie MacGregor, who happens to be a live sinner.

Neither of them wins her in the end. Instead, the winner is Sir Archibald MacKenzie, present owner of the castle. He drives her sane.

Good and Daftie

All of this is more amusing, projected with relish against John Root's atmospheric settings, than it sounds when put down in black and white. Besides the ghost and the angel, the daftie and the sinner, there're an American and his daughter, a publican and a barmaid, a minister and a piper and the Scone Stone which is supposed to be resting in Westminster Abbey as peacefully as possible.

As the titled ghost, Ralph—pronounced, if you please, the British way, like Ralph in "Pinafore"—Forbes is as right as right can be, which means he is as right as he was in "The Man With a Load of Mischief." Margaret Curtis is a winning daftie. I like her best, however, before she turns sensible on the audience. John Ireland rises from indifferent to good, from good to excellent, as the live and likable Laird of Cairn McGorum . . .

If "A Highland Fling" isn't too delightfully daftie for its own good, George Abbott has another hit on his hands. I'm for it. But with definite non-Circle qualifications.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 29, 1944

In Which a Ghost in Kilts and a Daftie in Scotland Do 'A Highland Fling'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE this is the season in which actresses, growing completely emancipated, have been writing their own plays, Margaret Curtis has come along with and in "A Highland Fling." It is easy to see why a number of people were interested in the script before George Abbott finally took it over, for the comedy has a good idea and some nice characters. But as it has reached the Plymouth after a tryout and a hiatus while waiting for a theatre, it does not reach up to its possibilities. Like other stories of ghosts and sinful mortals, it clings too closely to the ground, and it violates the noble Scotch trait of reticence by a talkativeness that is all but Irish.

• • •

Miss Curtis is writing of the ghost of a former Laird, his grandson to the fifth degree and a "daftie." Ghosts in Scotland can be seen only by children and daffies, which is, of course, a matter of sober fact. The ghostis in this case is promised heaven if he can reform one sinner on earth, and this he sets out to do, even though he is quite content with his own particular daftie. He reaches heaven, finally, but being a Scotch laird he doesn't like it very much, and when he is ejected to drop to earth again, he finds that his companion has fallen in love with someone else. Perhaps this sounds complicated; ghost stories usually are so. There also is another plot about the scone stone which, it seems, the English just think they own—but do not in reality.

With its scenes of castle courtyards and pubs, its plots about ghosts and the scone stone, Miss Curtis has written a play which is mainly fantasy, but partly realistic—or, at least, outwardly so. The fantasy sometimes is on the whimsical side, sometimes on the side of good Scotch practicality—with language to match in both cases. The whimsy occasionally goes over the border into a sort of theatrical coyness. The pub scenes, when the characters are good, earthy people, are perhaps the best parts of the play. "A Highland Fling" is the only comedy on Broadway with a bagpipe, for no Scottish pub is worth its bottles without a roaring bagpipe. O. K., the music.

• • •

Ralph Forbes is the ghost of Charlie MacKenzie, who on earth kissed the girls and was killed by a bottle over the head and not tilted against the mouth. Mr. Forbes is a big, brawny ghost with a fine swagger. As befits the lady who writes her own plays, Miss Curtis plays the daftie, and attractive looking she is also. John Ireland is the current laird, Karl Swenson the sinner who is to be reformed and Ivan Miller an American from Pittsburgh who comes over for the scone stone of Plot Two. Proper tribute should be paid to Patti Brady, a young lady of about 9, who is quite wonderful as the sinner's daughter. Like the daftie, she can see the ghost.

In directing, Mr. Abbott has put forward his best foot in the pub scenes, but has not given some of the others enough gaiety or speed. John Root's settings are good, one of them reaching practically out of the theatre the hard way—through the top. Perhaps it is only a child or a daftie who can talk properly to a ghost; at all events, from an alien corner "A Highland Fling" did not seem to be expressing itself as well as it might.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 29, 1944

"Daftie" and "Ghostie"

By HOWARD BARNES

A PLEASANT comical conceit has been blown up out of all proportions in "A Highland Fling." Margaret Curtis, author and chief actress of the new play at the Plymouth, has a lot of metaphysical fun with the ghost of a laird who is loath to go to heaven, and a daft lassie who goes for him. Even with George Abbott's meticulous staging, the fun is too rarely communicated across the footlights. Spirits and dialectal exaggeration have a substantial function in make-believe, but they do not add up very merrily in this show.

• • •

Miss Curtis must have been the first to sense the dramatic poverty of her material. Otherwise she would not have introduced a series of criss-cross themes which are never resolved in the play and only conjure up flurries of laughter. There is the doomed

romance between an ardent castle-haunter and the comely village idiot. There is a lot of to-do about the Scone Stone, which the ghost is guarding from English appropriation, until an American takes it off across the Atlantic. Somewhere in the midst of the fable comes the attempted regeneration of the town drunk, so that "ghostie," as he is known in the piece, can win his angel's wings and fly through heaven's portals.

• • •

There is tolerable amusement in the elaboration of these fantastical notions. The ghost, who is seen and heard only by the wacky and the very young, has several hilarious interludes as he rigs things against mere mortals and brushes off the wife who has been waiting for him in heaven for a couple of hundred years. The characterizations of typical residents in a remote Scotch village have been given caustic and funny underlining by the author on occasion and there is a rather nice romantic ending in which "daftie" gives up "ghostie" and falls in the arms of his real live descendent. The George Abbott directorial pace and shrewd grouping of characters is apparent throughout, but it does not sustain the fragments of comedy in the piece.

• • •

Miss Curtis is certainly better as an actress than she is at the playwriting game. As the screwloose lassie who falls in love with good old "ghostie" and then turns him down for his great, great, great, great grandson, she handles her best comic lines and Scotch burrs with considerable skill. Ralph Forbes is as good as one might wish in the part of the laird who sometimes appears on the stage as a visible wraith and takes a well-earned rest while doors open mysteriously and chairs move around without human propulsion. John Ireland is fine as the contemporary laird; Gloria Hallward does an excellent job as a barmaid and Patti Brady gives a remarkably inoffensive juvenile portrayal. Miss Curtis had a funny idea in "A Highland Fling," but with all the best intentions of the production, it is a thin little whimsy.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 29, 1944

'A Highland Fling' Has Scottish Spooks but Isn't Awfully Funny

By JOHN CHAPMAN

NEVER in your life did you see anything as determinedly Scotch as "A Highland Fling," which opened last night at the Plymouth. Everybody worked at it—the actors, including Margaret Curtis; the author, who is Margaret Curtis, and Sandy MacAbbott, the producer and director.

Everybody talked like Sir Harry Lauder. I was in there working, too, sweating it out and trying to cozen my daftie self into thinkin' it was a braw, bricht nicht—but it was no use. "A Highland Fling" is neither funny enough nor fanciful enough to make a Scottish ghost story. It is not nearly as good as Robert Donat's old movie, "The Ghost Goes West."

Miss Curtis' heather-hedged tale is about a castle haunted by the lustful shade of an ancient laird, who is caught 'twixt heaven and earth because of bygone wickedness. The presence of a good Scotch ghost can be felt by anybody, and children and lunatics can even see and talk with one. Thus, the spirit of "A Highland Fling" is known and loved by a daft lass who fancies herself as the Lady of Shalott and who is known among the villagers as Silly.

The plot has something to do with the ghost trying to get into heaven by committing one good deed—the reformation of the village wolf. Too much effort has gone into the plotting and the comedy seems forced and therefore unbelievable. It's equally forced and not credible when it takes a pixie slant. A love angle in which the loony girl is reclaimed for this sane world does not jell, and I left the theatre thinking she'd have had more fun if she'd stayed crazy.

Miss Curtis is most gentle and appealing as the unhinged one, and Ralph Forbes gets at least as much comedy out of the role of the ghost as went into it. The rest of a sizable company, including a small child named Patti Brady who also talks like Sir Harry Lauder, pitch in when they can. There are two good sets by John Root.

"Helen Goes to Troy"

Operetta by Jacques Offenbach, new version by Erich Wolfgang Korngold; book by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan, Jr.; lyrics by Herbert Baker; staging by Herbert Graf; dances by Leonide Massine; settings by Robert Edmond Jones. Presented by Yolanda Mero-Irion for the New Opera Company at the Alvin Theatre, April 24, 1944.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 25, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Helen Goes to Troy"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

HAVING earlier taken up Strauss and Lehar—in turn and with success—the New Opera Company has moved along to Offenbach, and once again it is giving Broadway a generally pleasing evening. This time the name is "Helen Goes to Troy," and as it opened last evening at the Alvin, it obviously was offering one of the most spectacular productions of the season, along with singing to match. Based on "La Belle Helene," it reaches out to take in other Offenbach songs—the hit tune is the Barcarole under another name—and it has Jarmila Novotna of the Metropolitan and others to sing them. When it decides to put on a show, the New Opera Company does not cut corners.

• • •

Robert Edmond Jones has designed the evening's excellent settings, and Ladislas Czettel has used wonderful color schemes for the costumes. When the stage is filled by the choruses, the effects of the lights and the dresses are immense. Down in the pit, leading the large orchestra, is Eric Wolfgang Korngold, who also put together the various Offenbach tunes; Mr. Korngold has had earlier experience with "La Belle Helene" in Europe. A late courier has reported that at the end Mr. Jones provides a wooden horse to bear his soldiers away, no doubt so they can easily capture all of Broadway by this morning.

Miss Novotna makes an agreeable Helen. The quality of her voice is no secret, certainly, and in addition she has an ease of manner for the less formal operatic stage. Her enunciation is clear, and since the show has new, modern lyrics—by Herbert Baker—that is an additional blessing. She probably will be responsible for putting "Love At Last"—this is the old friend, the Barcarole—on the hit parade once again. The Paris is William Horne, whose last Broadway appearance, before an honorable discharge, was singing "I'm Getting Tired So I Can Sleep" in Mr. Berlin's "This Is the Army"; he is excellent at both.

While the singing and music come right up to spell out the Broadway form of perfection, let the honeymoon suspend here for a moment to consider the book. "Helen Goes to Troy" is not the wittiest piece of literature just off Times Square, some of it is labored, and some of it well might be cut. The Leonide Massine dances, while giving enough movement on the stage, are not unusual nor do they boast humor. Any parody tale of Troy should be a little more sprightly than the words and the dances sometimes offered between songs. Heavy probably is the term for some of it.

• • •

Although the evening is music's, Ernest Truex of Equity is not lost on the stage of the Alvin. As Menelaus, he is at his best, shy, badgered, a little dim; he can use his expression to give more point than does some of the dialogue. Ralph Dumke is another amusing citizen of the classics; he is Calchas, the High Priest of Jupiter, and one of the most amiable actors on the stage. He has a beaming face and an air which plainly says Offenbach's excursion into the fate of Helen and her friends should not be taken too seriously; he refuses to take it so, at any rate.

The New Opera Company now has given three productions—"Rosalinda," "The Merry Widow," "Helen Goes to Troy." All have been carefully done, all have been among the pleasures of Broadway.

THE CAST

Philocomus, Assistant Seer.....George Rasely
Calchas, High Priest of Jupiter..Ralph Dumke
Helen, Queen of Sparta.....Jarmila Novotna
Orestes, Helen's Nephew.....Donald Buka
Parthenis, a Courtesan.....Doris Blake
Laena, Another Courtesan.....Phyllis Hill
Paris, Prince of Troy.....William Horne
Discordia, Goddess of Mischief..Rose Ingram
Minerva, Goddess of Wisdom.....Doris Blake
Juno, Wife of Jupiter.....RosalindNadell
Venus, Goddess of Love and Beauty.....Peggy Corday
Policeman.....Michael Mann
White Wing.....John Guelis
Ajax 1st, King of Small Nation...Jesse White
Ajax 2d, Another King, His Twin Brother.....Alfred Porter
Menelaus, King of Sparta.....Ernest Truex
Agamemnon, Another King, Menelaus's Brother.....Gordon Dilworth
Achilles, Another King.....Hugh Thompson
Lady-in-Waiting.....Jane Kiser
Premiere Danseuses—Katia Geleznova, Kathryn Lee, Nancy Mann.
Premier Dancers—Michael Mann, John Guelis, George Chaffee.

NEW YORK SUN
April 25, 1944

'Helen Goes to Troy' Is Pretty, Naughty, Very Well Sung and Still Offenbach

By OSCAR THOMPSON

"HELEN GOES TO TROY," a highly decorative new version of Offenbach's still naughty "La Belle Helene," frisked its way into favor at its opening in the Alvin Theater last night, after a busy week of previews. It has an exceptional singing cast and is very pretty to see. The New Opera Company does it handsomely.

Jarmila Novotna of the Metropolitan Opera and Ernest Truex of a half century of stage perambulations are its stars. Miss Novotna sang brilliantly and affectionally last night; she wore dazzling costumes and she acted tellingly in a somewhat European way. She was a slender and beguiling Helen.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who did a very breezy job of conducting and who prepared the liberally assorted musical score, gave Miss Novotna the Barcarolle from "The Tales of Hoffman" to sing and she voiced its phrases delightfully, as she did also the charming "Where Is Love" that serves as her first entrance and which is one of the few airs left from the original "Belle Helene."

A Singing Truex

Mr. Truex also had to sing. But not much. He was the gayly doddering husband, old King Menelaus, who returned unexpectedly and counted six feet projecting from his bed, only two of which were his own. Finally, for the sake of Homer, he climbed into the celebrated wooden horse and went off to war against the Trojans. He had an aversion to murmurs; in his experience they precede revolutions. And he just didn't care for the young Shepherd who turned out to be Prince Paris and ran away with his Helen. But he tried to keep Helen from waking Paris up after he had counted the feet in the bed. The old king was droll most of the time and really funny when he didn't go to Naxos.

Ralph Dumke was the High Priest of Jupiter who sent Menelaus, a bit too optimistically, where he didn't go, all for the purpose of enabling Helen to realize her too besetting dreams in the company of Paris. He is Calchas and in the oracle business, which George Rasely as an assistant seer helps him to make entertaining. His dancing and his singing of "What Will the Future Say?" were captivatingly remote from Offenbach's "Gay Paree."

The Paris of William Horne was better sung than it was acted, but was agreeable either way. A concert singer, he had the style and the high notes for his music and his voice was a good one. Two other resonant voices of operatic caliber were exhibited by Gordon Dilworth and Hugh Thompson, who made lusty fellows of Agamemnon and Achilles.

Donald Buka was an engaging young Orestes, and also sang a bit. As Discordia, Goddess of Mischief, Rose Inghram made the most of her solo in the prologue to Act II and spent the remainder of her time being attractive. Doris Blake, too, was pleasantly vocal in "The Legend of Paris," one of the most brilliant and haunting of Offenbach's melodies.

Expertness in Direction

The stage was well directed. "Helen Goes to Troy" is a sumptuous spectacle that will move smoothly as it accumulates performances. Perhaps there are moments when the relatively small stage is overcrowded; Herbert Graf masses his assemblages the operatic way. The choristers are young and comely, and the dancers not only are skilled but bring up the sum total of good looks. Only the dance prologue, called "Antiquity Awakes," which takes place during the playing of the Overture, was a bit rough last night; the idea is not one of the production's happiest. Robert Edmond Jones's sets are deftly done.

The new book by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan Jr., with lyrics by Herbert Baker, is full of laughs and not too diligently censored. The musical score has its liberal share of Korngold as well as a congeries of Offenbach. There are some sixteen numbers that are adaptations from other Offenbach operettas, including "La Perichole," "Genevieve," "Doctor Ox," "Roi Carotte," "Robinson Crusoe" and, in the case of the Barcarolle, "The Tales of Hoffman," though the last of these was first of all in the ill-starred "Rheinnixen." Only the Overture, the finales and a few of the solos were in the original "Belle Helene."

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 25, 1944

A Hit Is Launched

By HOWARD BARNES

A BLITHESOME blend of arias, ballets and clowning has come to the Alvin Theater. "Helen Goes to Troy," the latest offering of the New Opera Company, owes a considerable debt to previous interpolations of the Offenbach work. In its own right, it is a generally enchanting show. With Jarmila Novotna and William Horne handling the chief singing assignments, Ernest Truex and Ralph Dumke pulling off some jubilant antics, a willing ensemble of dancers and a resplendent production, it is an operetta delight. The gayety has a tendency to run thin before the ending, but there are few dull moments in this Yolanda Mero-Irion presentation.

* * *

While it is known as Max Reinhardt's "Helen Goes to Troy," it derives as fully from A. P. Herbert's "Helen," which had Evelyn Laye beguiling London audiences in 1932. Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan jr. have fashioned a new book and Erich Wolfgang Korngold has borrowed widely from Offenbach melodies, even including the "Barcarole" from "Tales of Hoffman" to enhance the production's musical felicity. Leonide Massine has designed effective choreography, Ladislas Czettel goes to town with his costumes and Robert Edmond Jones has set the action in expensive and tasteful showcases. Small wonder, then, that "Helen Goes to Troy" is a benison of the spring season.

* * *

The dancing is considerably less important than the vocal numbers and the comedy. Since Korngold has adapted the music neatly to the jocular demands of the book, this is no great defect. The story of Helen's liaison with Paris, which launched Homer on a writing career, is colloquial and sly, but it is brilliantly interpreted. Truex as Menelaus handles the most far-fetched lines with brilliant timing and pantomime. Dumke is not far behind him in making an engaging rascal out of Calchas, the seer and Miss Novotna demonstrates that she is a lovely and talented actress as well as an accomplished singer in the part of Helen. Melville Cooper's staging of the fanciful libretto is first rate, and a large cast supports the straight story line with skill and enthusiasm.

* * *

Starting with a scenic overture, the operetta tarries for a scene in the Temple of Jupiter in Sparta, reproduces the Judgment of Paris with gusto, and has great fun with the proud Grecians who were later to chase their queen to Troy in an epic struggle of antiquity. It may prove a bit fresh for orthodox operetta-lovers. To my mind, it is an entrancing adaptation. While the book is a lampoon, the score does not eschew satire. There is a marvelous parody on the opera and a dance number which moves from a supposed Grecian waltz into the can-can. "Love at Last," "Sweet Helen" and "Is This a Dream" find Novotna and Horne in a more serious singing mood. Straight or interpolated "Helen Goes to Troy" is an exceedingly satisfying entertainment of its genre. It is good-looking, tuneful and great good fun.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 25, 1944

It Is Lucky That Music Hath Charms

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I TRUST THAT Henry Simon, from his adjacent perch, will have good things to say of the music and singing in *Helen Goes to Troy*, for they seemed to me the real features of the occasion. In a season when musical comedy has been almost disgracefully lacking in good tunes, it is all the greater a pleasure for Broadway to get Offenbach's melodious and sometimes witty score, in Mr. Korngold's fresh arrangement. And Broadway may take pleasure, too, in the way it is sung—pre-eminently by Miss Novotna (with whose lovely voice go good looks and a taking manner), but very creditably, too, by the others in the cast.

Thanks to all this—and to some beautiful girls, likeable comics and a few high-spirited moments—*Helen Goes to Troy* provides a pleasant evening, and an evening well out of the ordinary. In other respects it is not very satisfactory. The production seems to me decidedly too elaborate, with a good deal more lavishness than elegance or style. As something which kids the Homeric story, *Helen* ought to be far lighter and wittier in its decor, tone and general movement; and ought equally to have far more flow and pace. Its taste for spectacle—even though some of the garishness and folderol have a comic intention—badly weighs it down. And the book weighs it down a good deal more. Though Ernest Truex and Ralph Dumke are thoroughly likeable and very helpful comics, they cannot work miracles on a book that besides frequently falling flat is also needlessly long. Like *The Boys from Syracuse*, *By Jupiter* and other musicals with ancient settings, *Helen* goes in heavily for anachronisms and stuff like "for Olympus' sake" and "sold down the Styx." It also indulges in such stuff as old-fashioned bedroom scenes where the springs are not the only things that creak. All this is no more good Broadway than it is good anything else.

To make an end of my complaints, I would say too, that in general Massine's choreography lacks the variety and wit that belong in a Broadway production.

On the other hand, there is Miss Novotna singing her head off both romantically and mischievously and looking as Helen should. There are such fetching things as the Judgment of Paris quartet and the first-act finale. In fact, there are music and singing to save the day. But Helen only goes to Troy—not to town.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 25, 1944

Handsome Is—

By ROBERT GARLAND

A LOT OF PAINS and pennies have gone into the turning out of "Helen Goes to Troy," the in-the-groove version of "La Belle Helene" which relighted the Alvin last evening. On paper, and in theory, this spoofing of the Helen-Menelaus-Paris monkey-business looks like a swell idea, a pushover, a natural. But, in spite of a new book, new lyrics and a new musical arrangement, no brand-new knockout comes of it.

When I tell you that Jarmila Novotna is the Helen; that Ernest Truex is the Menelaus; that Ralph Dumke is the Calchas; that Leonide Massine is the choreographer; that Robert Edmond Jones is the designer; that Melville Cooper is the director of the dialogue; that ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD—in caps, please—is the leader of the orchestra, you know as well as I that "Helen Goes to Troy" ought to be better and brighter than it is.

At any rate, Mme. Novotna is a melodious, beautiful and almost understandable Helen; Ernest Truex is frequently funny as the mouse-like Menelaus; Ralph Dumke works worthily as the High Priest; Peggy Corday, sticking herself out in front like Mary Martin, is a Venus to whom to hand a golden apple. As for the words and music, the words don't seem to belong to the music, and the music doesn't seem to belong to Offenbach . . .

A handsome, but somewhat heavy show.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 25, 1944

Jarmila Novotna Bewitching in a Beautiful 'Helen Goes to Troy'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

AS far back as I can remember, somebody has always been talking about making a New York production of Jacques Offenbach's opera bouffe, "La Belle Helene," but until last night nobody did anything about it. Last night Yolanda Mero-Irion and the New Opera Company shot the works by presenting at the Alvin an opulent, dazzingly beautiful version titled "Helen Goes to Troy."

The production has its shortcomings—or longcomings would be a better word. It needs pace, and some of its humor isn't very funny. But these faults, even if they remain, certainly won't be fatal, and a firm job of editing could eliminate them altogether. Right as it stands, "Helen Goes to Troy" is many times better than the routine musicals we have lately been getting, and it lends distinction to a theatrical season which could use same.

Distinction? A reading of the program credits will give you an idea:

Jarmila Novotna as Helen—a Czec beauty from grand opera who has an educated voice, gentility, humor, sophistication and the ability, rare among imported prima donnas, to sing an English lyric so you can understand it and to make you believe she understands it too.

Truex in Happy Return

Ernest Truex as Helen's mousy husband, Menelaus—a comedian who has always been able to make frustration funny. Truex has to battle through one grim scene—the old story about the drunk who comes home, falls into bed with his wife and then counts six feet protruding from the coverlet—but he has enough else that's better to make his return to Broadway a happy event.

New musical version by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, with Korngold conducting—conducting a fine big orchestra which gives the Offenbach melodies grace and solidity, too.

Production staged by Herbert Graf—an excellent job of coordinating a spectacle by a man from the Metropolitan Opera who has staged many charming things there, including "The Marriage of Figaro."

Many Fine Dances

Choreography by Leonide Massine—the old Russian with a hot-foot. Whenever it's possible, which is most of the time, Massine fills the stage with movement. His dancers are lithe and lovely and not above being humorous, and a second-act bacchanale (old Greek for big drunk party) is the most gracefully frenzied binge since Walt Disney had old Bacchus himself on a tear in "Fantasia."

"Helen Goes to Troy" is almost as much ballet as it is comic opera.

Production designed and lighted by Robert Edmond Jones—and not the Robert Edmond Jones who for years has been making a couple of flats look like a whole Shakespeare production, but an artist on the loose and happy in his work. There are many sets and they are all smartly beautiful.

And, concluding the main program credits, costumes by Ladislas Czettel. These are dreams—shimmering dreams for Mme. Novotna, and dreams ranging from the exotic to the deliberately amusing for the chorus, the dancers and the male principals.

William Horne Excellent

The story, as revamped by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan Jr., is still the familiar one of Paris, the original red-apple boy, coming from Troy to woo the Greek Helen. A number of Homeric characters are thrown in, like Agamemnon, Achilles, Minerva and Venus, and there is a modern touch here and there about peace, appeasement and what not—but nothing to get Lillian Hellman into a sweat.

Ralph Dumke, late of "The Merry Widow," works with great good will as a Greek oracle who dreams up Paris just to satisfy Helen, whose spouse, Menelaus, is less than vigorous. As Paris, William Horne has charm and a good tenor voice which he matches with Novotna's in a lovely duet, "Is It a Dream?"

The Offenbach score is always sweetly melodious and Herbert Baker's lyrics fit not only the music but also the book, and help both. I suppose the one "sock" song is the familiar barcarole, which has been interpolated for Mme. Novotna from "The Tales of Hoffmann." Since this number was interpolated into "Hoffmann" from some other Offenbach show, nobody can object to this new switch.

As I said, the production needs pace. Trimming of some overlong comedy scenes will help a lot—and another improvement will be for Conductor Korngold and the players to take a firm grip on the audience and let it know who's boss. Last night everybody was too polite on both sides of the footlights. Some enthusiasts would applaud every snatch of song and the company would wait for this amiable disturbance to die down. This slowed things up, and my advice to "Helen Goes to Troy" is to get going and stay going, for it is too wonderful a show to spoil.

NEW YORK POST
April 25, 1944

Helen Really Goes to Town — or, Jacques Offenbach at the Alvin

By HARRIET JOHNSON

IF Offenbach's ghost by any chance had looked in on the opening, last night, of his "La Belle Helene," renamed "Helen Goes to Troy," he might have been entertained and astounded, but there's no doubt about it—he would certainly have come out of the Alvin Theatre bewildered. Given a clairvoyance bestowed by the astral world, he could have recognized the mixup for what it is—a lavish extravaganza made up of a potpourri of his tunes taken from several operettas. These are attached to a streamlined, fast stepping, jazzy version of his "Helene," together with a few of its musical numbers as used in the original version, which opened in Paris at the Theatre des Varieties in 1864.

A program note states quite frankly that of the 20 odd numbers used in the current version, 14 are taken from "more or less forgotten Offenbach operettas." In addition there is one more from the "Bridge of Sighs" which is offered in a "modern fox trot tempo," and finally the well worn "Barcarolle" duet from "Tales of Hoffman," which Jarmila Novotna, who makes a glamorous Helen, sings as a solo.

From Canal to Bath

It was rather coy to transplant the Barcarolle from its setting in the "Tales" (which was a Venetian canal scene), but keep it near water. Helen sings the piece in a most beguiling manner in her seductive-looking bathroom, having just emerged from the tub.

The remaining overture, finales, and tunes are from the original "Helene" with incidental additions to fit the new dialogue and adapted plot. These latter were made by Mr. Korngold, who also has re-arranged and re-orchestrated the score, and who last night conducted a highly competent orchestra in fine, peppy style.

The book by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan is frequently amusing, sometimes slapstick in its reference to contemporary events, and also pleasantly risque. Other lines are labored but in general the dialogue is vastly superior to the typical operetta. Herbert Baker's lyrics aren't always grateful to sing, but they fit in with the general mood all right.

Production Lavish

The New Opera Company's production is well staged by Herbert Graf and the costumes, sets and lighting brilliantly effective in the extravagant manner of "The Merry Widow" and "Rosalinda." Nothing is spared to make the show something to be seen. Massine's choreography and the expert dancing also add to the colorful spectacle.

Novotna manages to have plenty of zip and still be refined. Her acting is consistently in good taste and her figure wears those slinky costumes well enough for a John Powers model. Her voice also suits the part and she puts her lines across with a keen sense of showmanship. Her slight accent is a trifle distracting but her words are easily understood.

Ralph Dumke as Calchas, High Priest of Jupiter and Ernest Truex as Menelaus, are both superbly funny and though neither one can sing, their attempts are uproarious and in character. William Horne is miscast as Paris; he neither looks dashing nor acts in a devilish Don Juan manner to convince us that he could attract the lovely Helen. His naturally fine voice also sounds forced, unnatural and his highest notes are taken falsetto. Rose Ingram as Discordia, Goddess of Mischief, does a clever bit, and Orestes is enthusiastically played by Donald Buka. George Rasely is excellent as Philocomus, assistant seer.

"Helen Goes to Troy" is a hodepodge but its good fun and if you don't mind Offenbach dressed up and the classics dressed down, you'll like it.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 25, 1944

Helen Goes to Troy— Good Fun Goes to Town

By BURTON RASCOE

THE new version of Max Reinhardt's burletta, La Belle Helene, which was presented as Helen Goes to Troy at the Alvin last night, is simply an unmitigated delight. People with discerning eyes and ears who are in a mood for jollity and sensuous relaxation will be storming the box office for tickets (such is my guess) for a long time to come.

Helen Goes to Troy is cultivated and high-toned burlesque in the pure and classical use of the term; for it is a comical and satirical representation of Homeric heroes, gods and goddesses, and of the beauteous Helen, as ignoble, inglorious and no better than they should be, but very human and engaging. Superior though it is, it is not high hat. It is almost as broad and rowdy as The Knights of Aristophanes. It is classical burletta on a spree, with all inhibitions down; and yet, in wit, humor and melody, it is on a plane about